

Dear Mr. Matte:

Thank you for your comments during the Mississippi River Commission public meeting held in Morgan City, Louisiana, on August 23, 2001. In your statement you discussed several items of concern to the Atchafalaya River Coalition.

The Atchafalaya River and Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black Reconnaissance Study is scheduled for completion in September 2001. In this study, the Corps is addressing the feasibility of deepening the navigation project to depths of up to 35 feet, based on navigation benefits. If the conclusions of this preliminary analysis are that a deeper channel is economically justified and environmentally acceptable, the Corps would proceed to the more detailed feasibility studies to further develop the plan. Flood control benefits will also be considered in the feasibility study.

The Corps dredges the channel to a bottom elevation of -24 feet mean low gulf (MLG). This is done by accounting for 2 feet of advance maintenance and by allowing the dredge 2 feet of overdepth. Due to the rapid return of light, suspended sediments, or "fluff," into the bar channel, the New Orleans District is considering additional advance maintenance to avoid frequent dredging. Prior to authorization and approval of additional advance maintenance, a cost analysis must be performed to ensure the least overall cost of maintaining the project. To address this, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) in Vicksburg, Mississippi, is conducting a study to evaluate the effects of fluff on the channel and means of improving the operability of the channel. The 15-month study is designed to determine, among other things, whether dredging deeper will result in keeping the layer of fluff below the authorized channel depth and how rapidly the fluff returns to the channel following maintenance dredging. While awaiting the results of the ERDC study, the Corps has implemented two interim solutions

to minimize the fluff problem. First, the number of dredging events in the bar channel was increased this fiscal year from two to three. Second, the Corps is investigating use of an interim disposal site to the west of the navigation channel. The Port of Morgan City is concerned that the near-shore currents, which move from east to west, transport the dredged material from the current disposal area back into the channel.

There are several pipelines that cross the bar channel at skewed angles, resulting in the pipelines occupying a longer "effective length" of channel than if the crossings were perpendicular to the channel. The top-of-pipe elevations are as shallow as -27 feet MLG. As a result, the Corps cannot dredge to the usual -24 feet MLG over the effective length of channel crossing. The analysis of additional advance maintenance that the Corps is performing will include the cost of relocating these pipelines.

The preliminary draft feasibility report for the Lower Atchafalaya Basin Reevaluation Study is currently under review by the Leadership Group. As requested by some members of the Leadership Group, the Corps extended the review period from August 30 to October 30, 2001. The draft report is scheduled for submission to the Mississippi River Commission by the New Orleans District in December 2001. The draft report recommends the implementation of a "barrier levee" to provide protection against backwater flooding from the Atchafalaya River to the areas east of Morgan City. Features of the recommended plan include a levee from Morgan City to Gibson, with floodwalls through residential and commercial areas; a lock or floodgate where the levee would cross the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (mile 89); a pump station and lock complex in Bayou Boeuf at Amelia; and a pump station on the Elliot Jones Canal near Gibson. The estimated cost of the barrier levee is approximately \$152,000,000 and, if authorized for construction, would be implemented over a number of years.

The New Orleans District has made great strides in advancing recreational features in the Lower Atchafalaya Basin since planning funds first became available in October 2000. The District is currently planning three recreational initiatives in the lower basin: (a) a new four-lane boat landing at Myette Point; (b) an 8000-foot-long park along the shoreline of Lake Palourde in Morgan City and lower St. Martin Parish, and (c) a regional interpretive center in Morgan City.

If funds were available, construction of the Myette Point boat landing could be initiated in Fiscal Year 2002. The New Orleans District remains engaged in dialogue about future recreational initiatives with

Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LADNR) and several local governments. All efforts will be fully coordinated with LADNR as the local sponsor and other stakeholders to ensure that their requirements are considered and incorporated as necessary into the overall management plan.

Thank you again for your presentation. The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U. S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission